

**“A VIBRANT MARRIAGE CULTURE: THE NOT-SO-SECRET WEAPON IN THE
FIGHT FOR A JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOCIETY”**

Talk for Christendom College’s 2017 Summer Conference

“Restoring the Divine Plan for the Human Person and Marriage”

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Introduction

It might seem ironic that I am here at this center of learning renowned for its fidelity to the teachings of the Catholic Church to speak at a conference whose theme is, “Restoring the Divine Plan for Love.” Ironic because back in my home city of San Francisco much celebration is taking place to mark the 50th anniversary of the so-called “summer of love”.

If you’re my age or older, you’ll remember that you didn’t have to be there to know what it was like. The images are quite vivid, even fifty years later for those of us who were alive then: crowds of young people in colorful clothing dancing to the strains of mellow music in Golden Gate Park, people immersing themselves with reckless abandon into all kinds of immediately-gratifying pleasures with no regard to the consequences.

The so-called “Summer of Love” attracted a wide range of people of various ages: teenagers and college students drawn by their peers and the allure of joining an alleged cultural utopia; middle-class vacationers; and even partying military personnel from bases within driving distance. The Haight-Ashbury could not accommodate this influx of people, and the neighborhood scene quickly deteriorated, with overcrowding, homelessness, hunger, drug problems, and crime afflicting the neighborhood – all of the usual consequences of unfettered indulgence in drugs, sex and rock ’n’ roll.

Cultural Ironies

The phenomenon we know as “the ’60s” was about a lot of things, some of which are values that we all accept and cherish to this day: nonviolence, closeness to nature, and a desire to break down artificial barriers and build up unity in the human family. It was, after all, the decade in which the civil rights movement reached its zenith, culminating in the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964. But we also know that for many 1967 was a brief “summer of love” followed by a long winter of drug addiction, family disintegration, and despair. One very sad recollection of the aftermath of the “summer of love” was shared by a woman still living in the Haight Ashbury 20 years later: “They were expecting a city of love and found a city like any other city, and a lot of them ended up being prostitutes” (Robert Lindsey, “Twenty Years After the Summer of Love, the Haight Ashbury Looks Back” *NY Times*, July 2, 1987).

Those years were marked by many ironies, which perplex me to this day. For example: yes, 1964 was an historical breakthrough for the civil rights of African-Americans, but the following year the Assistant Secretary of Labor (and later multi-term senator from New York), sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan, issued his famous report, “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action” (known as the Moynihan Report), identifying and analyzing the deep roots of black poverty in the United States. His conclusion? The high rate of fatherless families – 25 percent at the time – would greatly hinder progress of blacks toward economic and political equality. And there is no substitute for that. In fact, Moynihan – who favored government programs to assist the poor – stated in the report: “The steady expansion of this welfare program,

as of public assistance programs in general, can be taken as a steady disintegration of the Negro family structure over the past generation in the United States.”

So there's the irony: you'd think the society would recognize this and do everything possible to reverse this trend in the African-American community and prevent it from growing in other sectors of society. Instead, what happened? Right at the moment that African-Americans gained equality in the law, social conditions changed such that behaviors which contribute to and exacerbate this problem became accepted and even expected, thus keeping too many black families trapped in poverty. What many saw as a racially charged issue in 1964 has since spread throughout American society across ethnic groups. In 2015, 29 percent of births to white non-Hispanic mothers were outside of marriage, as were 53 percent of births to Hispanic mothers and 70 percent of births to black mothers. If we add divorce rates to this mix, we can see that the fraying of our family ties has touched virtually every community in America

And the ironies continued. Some of the more well-seasoned citizens here may remember, as I, the famous “Murphy Brown” line of then-Vice President Dan Quayle. This is where, in a speech in 1992 to the Commonwealth Club of – of all places – my own town of San Francisco, he took a swipe at the popular TV character, saying that she was “mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone and calling it just another lifestyle choice.” This, of course, caused a huge storm of controversy, and he took a lot of heat for it. And yet, a year later, an article was published in the Atlantic Magazine (April 1993) authored by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead with the bold title, “Dan Quayle Was Right.” To give you a gist of the content of the article, the précis under the heading stated the following:

The social-science evidence is in: though it may benefit the adults involved, the dissolution of intact two-parent families is harmful to large numbers of children. Moreover, the author argues, family diversity in the form of increasing numbers of single-parent and stepparent families does not strengthen the social fabric but, rather, dramatically weakens and undermines society.

And even Candice Bergen herself, who played Murphy Brown, said in an article published by the Associated Press ten years later (July 11, 2002): “... his [Vice President Quayle's] speech was a perfectly intelligent speech about fathers not being dispensable and nobody agreed with that more than I did.”

That article by Dafoe Whitehead though, was just one small drop in the very large bucket of social science data collected ever since the Moynihan Report confirming his analysis linking so many grave social ills such as poverty, crime, incarceration, school drop-out rates and youth violence with family breakdown and, especially, fatherless families. As just one example, a couple of years ago the book, “Do Fathers Matter?”, was published, with the subtitle, “What Science Is Telling Us About the Parent We've Overlooked.” In it, author Paul Raeburn points out, “There is no example of a human society in which fathers do not help raise the children” (Raeburn, 19) and that, “For most of human history, fathers were responsible for protecting their children and for teaching them the things they needed to know to survive and prosper” (212). He explores many of the new experiments that have been completed on animals that appear to shed light on the unique contributions of fathers on children. A study from David Popenoe at Rutgers University, cited in the book, says that “the evidence is overwhelming” that a family of mother and father is better for the child than one parent (222). And in fact, Senator Moynihan himself,

in an interview with PBS in 2001, said, with what sounds like a tone of almost fatalistic resignation, the following:

My view is we had stumbled onto a major social change in the circumstances of post-modern society. It was not long ago in this past century that an anthropologist working in London ... postulated what he called the first rule of anthropology: That in all known societies, all male children have an acknowledged male parent. That's what we found out everywhere.... And well, maybe it's not true anymore. Human societies change.

All of this is, I believe, emblematic of a societal schizophrenia that has marked our nation (and much of the rest of the world, too) regarding the basic idea of marriage and the family: we bemoan so many social ills, especially poverty, which we know from broad, deep and consistent scientific data – not to mention common sense – is caused in large part by fatherlessness, while at the same time celebrating and enshrining in the popular culture a distorted notion of freedom with corresponding behaviors that destroy the integrity of marriage and the family, the very thing necessary to cure and prevent those social ills in the first place. That is precisely the purpose of marriage. Or, as someone more studied than I on this subject put it: when a baby is born, the mother is sure to be somewhere nearby; there's no guarantee, though, that the father will be. Society needs a cultural mechanism that attaches fathers to their children and to the woman with whom they brought those children into the world. That cultural mechanism is marriage, and it's the only one there is; there simply isn't any other. It is not a "Catholic thing," then, to say that children need a father as well as a mother in order to have the optimal environment for their own flourishing. On the contrary, it is a universal principle that societies that don't manage the procreative implications of the sexual act don't last for very long.

What Does Love Mean?

So, that's the bad news. But now compare all this to Pope Francis' opening words in his post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*: "The joy of love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church" (AL 1). What is most noteworthy here is where he does *not* begin: with the experiences and challenges of families today. That is dealt with in the second chapter. The Holy Father begins by asking how God envisions the family. Only then does he examine contemporary experience and move on to a specifically Christian understanding of marriage and family life. This order of topics is extremely important, because it forthrightly affirms our conviction that there *is* a divine plan for marriage and family.

"The joy of love": that is really what is at the root of all of the irony and confusion and social schizophrenia to which I referred a moment ago. It is simply the meaning of the word "love." That word certainly evokes complex realities, and it is necessary to exercise careful discernment. We might say of that watchword of the '60s, "free love," what G.K. Chesterton said about "birth control": it is neither. If by "free love" we mean intimacy without commitment, then it is certainly not love (except the poisonous self-love that uses another person for one's own gratification) nor is it in fact free – rather, its price has been extremely high both for society and for countless individuals.

There is another sense, though, in which "free love" can be profoundly real and deeply Catholic. It is the freedom manifested in God Who created everything in order to share His

divine goodness, and Who made us in His image and likeness to enter into a communion of love with Him. It is the freedom of unconditional divine love that sustains us in existence, the love of a heavenly Father who sends His rain on the just and on the unjust alike (Mt 5:45). It is the freedom manifested in Jesus Christ who showed the depth of his love by freely laying down his life on the Cross. “Free love” that is self-giving and sacrificial is divine, and it is that kind of love that is at the heart of God’s divine plan for marriage and the family. Love put into action is what we call “charity.” On this point Pope Benedict said in his Encyclical “God is Love” – “Deus Caritas Est”: “Charity ... cannot be used as a means of engaging in what is nowadays considered proselytism. Love is free; it is not practiced as a way of achieving other ends” (DCE 31c). “Love is free.” So there you have it: even Pope Benedict is encouraging us to engage in free love! That is because, understood in this Catholic sense, “free love” is nothing other than God’s plan for our human flourishing.

Let us, then, go back to Pope Francis’ starting point in *Amoris Laetitia*. I would like to summarize the principal truths Pope Francis proclaims in that foundational first chapter. He begins paragraph 10 by stating: “The majestic early chapters of Genesis present the human couple in its deepest reality. Those first pages of the Bible make a number of very clear statements.” He then proceeds to enumerate what those clear statements are:

1. “God created man in His own image; male and female He created them. It is striking that the ‘image of God’ here refers to the couple, ‘male and female’. ... the fruitfulness of the human couple is a living and effective ‘image’, a visible sign of God’s creative act” (AL 10).

2. “The couple that loves and begets life is a true, living icon capable of revealing God the Creator and Savior. The ability of human couples to beget life is the path along which the history of salvation progresses. Seen this way the couple’s fruitful relationship becomes an image for understanding and describing the mystery of God Himself, for in the Christian vision of the Trinity, God is contemplated as Father, Son and Spirit of love. The triune God is a communion of love and the family is its living reflection” (AL 11).

3. “In this communion of love, the encounter between man and woman, which relieves human solitude, gives rise to new birth and to the family. The marital union is evoked not only in its sexual and corporal dimension, but also in its voluntary self-giving in love. The result of this union is that the two ‘become one flesh’, both physically and in the union of their hearts and lives, and, eventually, in a child, who will share not only genetically but also spiritually in the ‘flesh’ of both parents” (AL 13).

4. “If the parents are in some sense the foundations of the home, the children are like the ‘living stones’ of the family. The family should be a ‘domestic church’ where parents realize the important responsibility they have to educate their children in the faith. The gospel also reminds us that children are not the property of a family, but have their own lives to lead” (AL 14-18).

After this he speaks of the importance of work, the need for tenderness in mutual relations, and the relationship between the family, society, and the environment. The Holy Father then concludes:

With a gaze of faith and love, grace and fidelity, we have contemplated the relationship between human families and the divine Trinity. The word of God tells us that the family is entrusted to a man, a woman and their children, so that they may become a communion of persons in the image of the union of the

Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Begetting and raising children, for its part, mirrors God's creative work [AL 29].

God's Marriage Covenant with the Human Race

At the very outset of *Amoris Laetitia*, then, Pope Francis emphasizes that we must begin from God, and not from ourselves. This is in fact the approach taken by Jesus himself. When the Pharisees raised the question of divorce and pointed out that Moses allowed the practice, our Lord objected that this represented an expedient made for human weakness. For Jesus, the question is not, "what does the law permit?"; rather, it is, "what is the will of God?" His answer is quite straightforward: "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator "made them male and female" and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate" (Mt 19:4-5).

So, let's start where the Scripture verse that Jesus cites here is found, which is also where Pope Francis starts, that is, at the very beginning: Genesis chapter one, the first account of creation. Genesis 1:27 presents the creation of the man and woman as the culmination of God's creative activity: "God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." The next chapter speaks of God creating the man first, and then the rest of creation to be a suitable helpmate for him, none of which, though, meets the mark until He creates the woman from one of Adam's ribs while he is asleep. In that first Encyclical of his, "God is Love," Pope Benedict, with original insight, sees here a connection between monotheism and monogamy; at the same time he gives another original insight in reclaiming the love that is "*eros*" with a Christian meaning. He says:

... the idea is certainly present [here] that man is somehow incomplete, driven by nature to seek in another the part that can make him whole, the idea that only in communion with the opposite sex can he become 'complete'. The biblical account thus concludes with a prophecy about Adam: 'Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh' (Gen 2:24).

Two aspects of this are important. First, *eros* is somehow rooted in man's very nature; Adam is a seeker, who 'abandons his mother and father' in order to find woman; only together do the two represent complete humanity and become 'one flesh'. The second aspect is equally important. From the standpoint of creation, *eros* directs man towards marriage, to a bond which is unique and definitive; thus, and only thus, does it fulfill its deepest purpose. Corresponding to the image of a monotheistic God is monogamous marriage. *Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa* [DCE 11; emphasis added].

This passage of Genesis is critical, because it sets the pattern for the whole rest of Bible, and for all that will later be revealed and, indeed, for all of salvation history.

We can already see this in the next step through the Bible, the prophets. They frequently speak of Israel's relationship to the Lord as a bride to her bridegroom, even to the point of accusing them of being an adulterous bride when they violate their Covenant with the one, true God by worshipping the false gods of their more powerful neighboring pagan nations. There is also a book of the Old Testament that is nothing but a collection of love poems: the Song of Songs. Why in the world would a collection of love poems be entered into the canon of Scripture? Pope Benedict explains why, also in "God is Love":

... the reception of the Song of Songs in the canon of sacred Scripture was soon explained by the idea that these love songs ultimately describe God's relation to man and man's relation to God. Thus the Song of Songs became, both in Christian and Jewish literature, a source of mystical knowledge and experience, an expression of the essence of biblical faith: that man can indeed enter into union with God – his primordial aspiration. But this union is ... a unity in which both God and man remain themselves and yet become fully one. As Saint Paul says: 'He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him' (1 Cor 6:17) [DCE 10].

Is this nothing other than the nuptial mystery, that is, the two becoming fully one, yet remaining themselves, each retaining their unique individual identity?

Moving on to the New Testament, we have various sayings and parables of Jesus alluding to this imagery, such as the parable of the ten virgins (five wise, five foolish) who took lamps with them to *go out and meet the bridegroom* (Mt 25:1-13). It is also significant that Jesus chose the occasion of a marriage feast to perform his first miracle; his response to his mother, "My hour has not yet come," is a reference to the consummation of God's marriage to His people that would be accomplished by his death on the Cross.

A truly pivotal passage in the New Testament is the fifth chapter of St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, in which he teaches about the sacramental meaning of marriage, the man symbolizing Christ and the woman the Church. He then points to this as the fulfillment of that prophecy from Genesis: "'For this reason a man shall leave [his] father and [his] mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church" (Eph 5:31-32).

Finally, in the Book of Revelation the culmination of all of history at the end times is revealed by the wedding feast of the Lamb. In relating his vision to us, St. John says, "[T]he wedding day of the Lamb has come, his bride has made herself ready.... Then the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who have been called to the wedding feast of the Lamb'" (Rev 19:7.9).

So it is that the Bible begins and ends with a marriage – Adam and Eve and the wedding feast of the Lamb – and it is replete with this nuptial imagery all throughout. God's Covenant with Israel is a marriage Covenant; it is fulfilled in the blood of Christ on the Cross, establishing the new and eternal Covenant between him, the bridegroom, and his bride, the Church. In fact, we learn from the Fathers of the Church that God's creation of a bride for His son Adam from Adam's side as he slept was a foreshadowing of God the Father's creation of a bride – the Church – for His Only-Begotten Son as he lay in the sleep of death on the Cross. Christ gives the seed of life to his bride, the Church, from the blood and water that flowed from his side on

the Cross. The Church, as bride and mother, receives it, generates new life for his Kingdom (the water of baptism) and nourishes that new life through the grace of the sacraments (his blood, the Eucharist) and by teaching the truth received from him.

Human Ecology: Building a Civilization of Truth and Love

All of this is the background in our Catholic teaching to Pope Francis' teaching in *Amoris Laetitia* on "the relationship between human families and the divine Trinity." The fingerprints of marriage are everywhere, indeed, even on how the mystery of our eternal salvation is achieved. This is a consequence of the principle of human ecology, according to which all sectors of life are interconnected, and which is at work more than ever in the area of marriage. Now, Pope Francis has made quite a name for himself in the area of ecology, given his teaching and advocacy on behalf of the environment. But he has also not been reticent to speak about the good of the complementarity of man and woman, and the urgent need for societies to recognize this. Very importantly, he has highlighted the interconnection between the two on more than one occasion. Just listen to these words he spoke about three years ago, in an address to the participants at the International Colloquium on the Complementarity between Man and Woman sponsored by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the Vatican:

Marriage and the family are in crisis today. We now live in a culture of the temporary, in which more and more people reject marriage as a public obligation. This revolution of customs and morals has often waved 'the flag of freedom', but it has, in reality, brought spiritual and material devastation to countless human beings, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. It is ever more evident that the decline of the culture of marriage is associated with increased poverty and a host of other social ills that disproportionately affect women, children and the elderly. It is always they who suffer the most in this crisis.

The crisis of the family has produced a human ecological crisis, for social environments, like natural environments, need protection. Although humanity has come to understand the need to address the conditions that threaten our natural environment, we have been slow – we have been slow in our culture, even in our Catholic culture – we have been slow to recognize that even our social environments are at risk. It is therefore essential that we foster a new human ecology and make it move forward.

A "new human ecology": that is, fostering the understanding of how all of the different spheres of our existence are interrelated – the physical, the spiritual, the social, and so forth. This is a point we can immediately understand at the level of the physical environment. A river that's polluted in one country will be polluted in its neighboring country. The bad air quality in one city will affect the communities surrounding it. We can also certainly understand its application to the economy. If there could ever be any doubt about that, the global economic crisis that hit in 2008 has done away with that. But this is a basic operating principle of all of life and therefore one which applies at all other levels as well: at the level of physical health where the various systems of the body are all interconnected; at the levels of spiritual and moral health,

which in turn affect the quality of our human relationships and even economic health. That is, all of these levels are furthermore interconnected among themselves. They all affect each other. And so, in his very Encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis can be so bold as to say the following:

Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. Also, valuing one's own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment. It is not a healthy attitude which would seek 'to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it' [LS 155].

A little before this Pope Francis references Pope Benedict XVI, who teaches at length on the principle of human ecology in his Encyclical on Catholic social teaching, *Caritas in Veritate*. This is Francis' sort of footnote to Benedict, who opened up this insight for future generations. He cites Benedict's teaching that there is a relationship between human life and moral law which is necessary to respect for a dignified environment. Quoting Benedict, he says, "man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will." Attempting to do so is another symptom of the social schizophrenia we are witnessing today, where the human person is not seen as an integrated whole, but sort of compartmentalized in silos: the spiritual over here and the moral over there, having nothing to do with each other; or the attitude, "private is private and public is public, and never the twain shall meet." It is the basis for the very popular and acceptable attitude today which says, "I'm spiritual, but not religious." As Pope Benedict says in *Caritas in Veritate*:

The book of nature is one and indivisible: it takes in not only the environment but also life, sexuality, marriage, the family, social relations: in a word, integral human development. Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in himself and in relation to others. It would be wrong to uphold one set of duties while trampling on the other. Herein lies a grave contradiction in our mentality and practice today: one which demeans the person, disrupts the environment and damages society [CIV 51].

All of this comes about from a fundamental misunderstanding of the human person, basically, what a human being is; philosophers would call it an "anthropological error." Pope Francis refers to it as a "misguided anthropocentrism": man puts himself at the center and pushes God to the margins. Out of sight, out of mind!

Earlier on in *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis warns that this "misguided anthropocentrism" leads to a misguided lifestyle:

When human beings place themselves at the centre, they give absolute priority to immediate convenience and all else becomes relative. Hence we should not be surprised to find, in conjunction with the omnipresent technocratic paradigm and the cult of unlimited human power, the rise of a relativism which sees everything as irrelevant unless it serves one's own immediate interests. There is a logic in all this whereby different attitudes can feed on one another, leading to environmental degradation and social decay [LS 122].

Witnesses More Than Teachers

Pope Benedict entitled his Encyclical on Catholic Social Teaching *Caritas in Veritate*: speaking and doing the truth in love. All of this highlights why: there is a lot of truth we need to speak these days, but always out of love. Truth and love are the solid foundation of any healthy and flourishing society. I was edified some years ago by a group of young people at a large, working-class Hispanic parish in our Archdiocese to where I had gone to celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation for them. At the ceremony, two of the young people shared some reflections on what their Confirmation meant to them. They said that their Confirmation gave them the grace to go forth and “build a civilization of truth and love.” I could not have said it better myself! *Caritas in veritate*: the foundation of civilization. Both are necessary, both, together, if we wish to have a flourishing society: both truth *and* love.

How can we speak the truth in love to our world? This is simply another way of asking how we can evangelize. An insight by Pope Paul VI offers sound guidance. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, he writes:

... it is appropriate ... to emphasize the following point: for the Church, the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life, given over to God in a communion that nothing should destroy and at the same time given to one's neighbor with limitless zeal. As we said recently to a group of lay people, ‘Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.’ St. Peter expressed this well when he held up the example of a reverent and chaste life that wins over even without a word those who refuse to obey the word (1 Pt 3:1). It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus – the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity [EV 41].

The witness of sanctity! That is our most persuasive argument. The first believers lived in a society whose moral values stood in stark contrast to the truly “free love” of Christian discipleship. They were often dismissed with a sneer smacking with an air of superiority, or worse, imprisoned or put to death because their way of life was an affront to those around them. But even those who despised them admired them. In the third century, Tertullian averred that

even our enemies paid us this compliment. This great apologist described how Christian communities used their resources:

... not for banquets or drinking parties ... but for the support and burial of the poor, for children who are without parents and means of subsistence, for aged men who are confined to the house; likewise, for shipwrecked sailors, and for any in the mines, on islands or in prisons. Provided only it be for the sake of fellowship with God, they become entitled to loving and protective care for their confession. The practice of such a special love brands us in the eyes of some. 'See,' they say, 'how they love one another. ... See how ready they are to die for each other' [Apology 39].

This is the legacy we have received from our ancestors in the faith. Those first generations of Christians in the city of Rome were so often scapegoated by the powerful pagan Roman government. But when a plague would strike the city and the well-to-do fled to the hills for safety until the plague subsided, it was the Christians who stayed behind to care for the sick, and at great risk to their own health and very lives. And not just the Christian sick: all the sick, regardless of religion, of how they lived their lives, or even what they thought of the Christians themselves. The historian Eusebius noted about the Christians of his time, "All day long some of them tended to the dying and to their burial, countless numbers with no one to care for them. Others gathered together from all parts of the city a multitude of those withered from famine and distributed bread to them all." Likewise, the Emperor Julian complained to one of his pagan priests, "[They] support not only their poor, but ours as well."

What the saints offer us is not a brief "summer of love" but a perpetual "springtime of love" that is constantly refreshed by divine love. This is where the lasting joy of love is to be found. It is this kind of love and compassion in the service of truth, especially the truth of the human person, that has marked the lives of the holy ones who are our predecessors in the faith: hospitals, orphanages, schools, outreach to the poor and destitute – giving without concern for getting anything in return, seeing in each human being, especially in the poor and destitute, a priceless child beloved by God, whom God calls to turn away from sin and toward Him, so that they might be saved.

Marriage: The Way to Civilization

This is the courageous witness we are called to today, especially in the area of marriage. Marriage is supposed to help a society learn the real lesson of "free love," learning the lesson to be selfless, living for the other, not oneself. As St. John Paul II said so famously in his own Encyclical on marriage and the family, *Familiaris Consortio*: "The future of the world and of the church passes through the family" (FC 75). That is to say, the way of civilization passes through marriage. But so does our work of evangelization. Better yet, the work of evangelization is precisely the work of building a truly human civilization, that is, one based on the truth of the human person and God's plan for our flourishing both as individuals and as a society, and, indeed for our eternal salvation. Marriage is absolutely indispensable to this project in every way.

It was through monogamous, life-long, faithful marriage that the Church was able to Christianize a pagan world, and call it to a higher and more noble – that is to say, truly human –

civilization. Indeed, when you consider that the entire Judeo-Christian religious tradition is premised on the concept of sexual difference and complementarity in marriage, then it becomes clear that, if we lose that concept, nothing of our faith tradition will make any sense in the culture. Precisely because revealed truth is not super-imposed on nature but builds on it – that is, builds upon truths that are accessible to reason alone from the observation of nature – when the culture can no longer apprehend those natural truths, then the very foundation of our teaching evaporates and nothing we have to offer will make sense. This is yet another manifestation of the principle of human ecology: natural truths and revealed truths are also interrelated. The key, then, to evangelization in our time, and to building a healthy and flourishing society for one and all, is to rebuild a marriage culture. God's plan for creating the human person male and female is a demanding but beautiful thing, and is something we accept and cherish to our benefit or reject and ignore to our demise.

Conclusion

But let us be careful not to make the same “anthropological error” and put ourselves at the center and push God to the margin: it is *God* Who does the building. As Psalm 127 says: “Unless the LORD build the house, they labor in vain who build. Unless the LORD guard the city, in vain does the guard keep watch.” The work of civilization building – or “kingdom building,” to put it in more common parlance – is the Lord's doing, not ours. If it were ours, then we could change it, it would give *us* the control over the project. Thus, we would be not unlike the ancient Israelites who made the molten calf, and worshipped the work of their own hands. Just as they felt the tug back to the paganism out of which the Lord called them, so do we feel the tug of the neo-paganism of our own time. So we need to make sure we have that right from the start: God does the building; we are just his day laborers.

Love is the answer. “Free love,” actually, properly understood. But love in the truth. And the truth doesn't change. Laws might change, but truth doesn't. If the law does not correspond to our nature, such that there is a conflict between the law and nature, guess which will prevail? And so it is no surprise that we have a lot to fix in our society. A society of justice, peace and prosperity for all: these are the fruits of a society with a strong culture of marriage and the family. This noble cause is a call to love that we cannot abandon, that we will not give up on, and that in the end we know will triumph.

So let us steel ourselves, with the help of God's grace, to bear witness to the truth in love, for the truth spoken in love has a power over the human heart. The truth *lived* in love has even a greater power over the human heart, the power of attraction. Let us, then, pick up the torch, and pass on to a new generation the truth about marriage, not just the abstract truth, but the lived reality that makes a difference in our lives and in the lives of those around us, friend and foe alike. Let us take heart from the legacy we have received, let us place our trust in God, and let us go forth to be God's workers in building a civilization of truth and love.